# Appendix a

# Theatres

## A. THE CENTRAL THEATRE

### 1. PROGRAMME AND USERSHIP

**Programming Policy**

To offer the widest possible range of popular entertainment for all ages from small children upwards, in a mixed programme which includes the work of local amateur performers alongside high quality professional touring – all at an affordable price.

The Central Theatre offers an average of 300 performances per year on approximately 250 days (5-days per week)

**Programme Balance**

**a) Professional programme**

- Centred on music - Rock and Pop being the most significant sector
- Headline comedy programme with regular sell-outs
- Growing drama programme with '***a*CT *now!***' drama subscription (3 plays for only £27). Now attracting 1,600 customers per season.
- Regular classical ballet visits
- Classical concert seasons with growing audiences
- Live children's theatre all year round
- Highly popular annual pantomime
- Film programme for both children and adults
- Curriculum-based work targeted at schools
- Commercial hires (Evolution Productions, OEP Ltd etc)

**b) Amateur programme**

The Central Theatre hosts all Medway amateur music theatre companies including

- Kentish Players
- Three Towns Theatre Company
- Gillingham Operatic and Dramatic Society
- The New Phoenix Players

- Upstage Productions
- Medway Opera

- Plus
- City of Rochester Symphony Orchestra
- Rainham Ladies Choir
- Chatham Marine Cadets (Band of the Royal Marines)
- The Salvation Army
- Medway Schools Music Association
- Sainsbury's Veterans Association
- Chatham Grammar School for Boys (Annual Prize-giving)
- Various Medway Council conferences, including 'Licence to Kill'
- Toni Moss Dance Academy -and most major dance schools in Medway

**Venue Footfall**

Footfall indicates an average of 90 –100,000 ticket-buying users per annum, plus customers using the 'Sandwich Cellar' lunchtime provision etc.

**Recent developments in programming at The Central Theatre**:

**Drama programme** – growing steadily, without funding support – the only professional drama programme in Medway. Response to customer feedback Schools drama workshops and special schools matinees are offered where possible and appropriate. In Feb and Mar 2007, workshops and matinees were offered to Medway schools for plays by Bertold Brecht and David Mamet, with attendances reaching 150 students for the Brecht. This was made possible by partnership working between the venue and the Arts Development Team's Education & Outreach Officer.

**Classical Music, (The City of London Sinfonia)** Arts Council funded for the last four years to a total of £97,000 and showing excellent growth in audiences, its future has been funding secured through 'Orchestras Live', an ACE-funded development agency, initially offering £10,000 on 2008. Orchestras Live, working with the venue management are developing a programme of work in the spring/summer of 2008 with Fairbridge Pupil Referral Unit, Rochester Girls Grammar School and Hundered of Hoo School, culminating in public performance in June. Further collaboration between the venue and the Arts Development Team has underpinned the effective targeting of this exercise.

**National Schools Film Week**
Another example of the close working relationship between parts of the service. Here films are offered free of charge to both Primary and Secondary Schools in

Medway, through involvement with Film Education. Attendances reached 3,000 across five showings of three different titles.

## 2. THE CENTRAL THEATRE'S POSITIONING AND PERCEIVED IMAGE

### The Positioning of the Venue

The Central Theatre's ethos is a popular arts and entertainment venue in Medway that offers the widest possible programme of high quality live presentation chosen for the people of Medway. (see quotes from the press) Open up to 5 days per week on average. 300 performances per year. This has risen from some 80 performances a year in the mid-1990s (See CPA report)

It has a very broad mixed programme ranging from rock & pop, to high-profile comedy, from ballet to classical music, children's theatre to most kinds of popular music, plus film in the school holidays. A highly popular annual family pantomime, attracting major star names to Medway, is the 'cash cow' of the service (Estd £340,000 / 30,000 tickets in 2007/8).

*"The theatre was packed with parties of schoolchildren who watched the flying sequences with awe and roared with laughter at the antics of the principal comic, Smee" Jimmie Hodge, Medway Standard December 06*

*"As the cast take their bow, Smee ask the audience if they've enjoyed the show. The resounding 'yes' that rang through the theatre told him all he needed to know. Sarah Clarke, Medway Messenger December 06*

Pantomime value has increased dramatically since the renegotiation of contracts in 2004. Income then of £289,000 has risen to an estimated £340,000 in 2007/8. Ticket yield has leapt from an average price paid of £9.00 in 2004 to £12.00 this year – an increase of 33%. Figure for 2007 reflects a major new pricing strategy implemented this year.

The Central Theatre is also the principal venue for the major amateur music theatre companies in Medway (GODS, Three Towns, Medway Opera, Kentish Players etc) and a wide range of regular hirers from Medway (list them, CRSO, Medway Schools Music Assoc, Chatham Marine Cadets). Conference programme is small but significant.

The ACT Needs Analysis noted that "*the people of Medway are enthusiastic amateur participants*", flagging up " *a wide range of theatre groups, arts societies, bands, choirs and orchestras",* described as *"a burgeoning talent base*" in the area.

**The Central Theatre's Image**

The Central Theatre is recognised in the UK theatre industry as a venue which:

- Is able to 'sell' shows. (Important in securing contract terms based on a percentage of box office – ie at no risk to the council) This is substantiated by the relevant Performance Indicators.
- Presents work to the highest standard (See quotes from press and customers)
- Is welcoming and responsive to industry requirements.

Sample quotes from professional and amateur users:

*"Great Guys. Thank you. It was a pleasure." – London Classic Theatre 5/5/07 on feedback form re Central*

*"FAB venue!!!. FAB CREW!!!" – 'That'll be the Day' (Rock n roll show), 16/11/07, on feedback form re Central*

*"Thank you very much……you and your team ensured that the day went off without a hitch" –, Salvation Army (re event at Central in Dec 06)*

Within Medway the Central Theatre is valued by its audiences as a venue which: -

1.Offers an enviable range of good quality programming for all tastes.

*" A host of top acts have been confirmed for the Central Theatre's forthcoming autumn season" Medway News July 07*

*'Chatham's Central Theatre is such a versatile venue. One minute audiences are reeling from the tongue of the comedian….., the next it's a cathedral of quiet as ears strain to the sounds of a classic play', Medway Standard Nov 07*

2. Offers competitively priced tickets

*(ACT research shows 6% of respondents –a low industry level – offered resistance to Central Theatre prices. Pricing policy specifically recognising low disposable income in Medway)*

3. Is popular and welcoming to customers and responsive to their needs – viz introduction of the act now! drama subscription programme

Sample quotes from customers:

*"What a smashing show……." – Mr H, Chatham (by comment card re Beyond The Barricades, May 07, at the Central)*

*"I really enjoyed my night at the theatre" – Mrs S, Rochester (via email re Derek Acorah, Central, May 07)*

*"Pantomimes at The Central Theatre tend to be rather more traditional and better than those in other regional theatres" – SF (by email Jan 07)*

## 3. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

### Strengths

- Central High Street location
- High volume capacity - 965-seats with frequent sell-outs
- Good presentational capability for most types of show
- Comfortable auditorium (recently re-furbished seating etc)
- Established high quality reputation in the industry
- Good disabled access (except backstage)
- Full-screen, Dolby sound cinema capability

### Weaknesses

- Narrow High Street frontage/presence
- Cramped stage capacity limits what can be programmed
- Very limited circulation space (approx 20% of seating capacity)
- Limited secondary-spend income potential because of building layout and lack of air conditioning/poor environment of the Cellar Bar
- Complete lack of evening economy in Chatham
- Image of insecurity in the vicinity

The following verbatim quoted from the Medway Renaissance ACT Report, illustrate these perceptions of insecurity:

*" I hate coming into Chatham at night. It's not necessarily unsafe, but when you hear a noise behind you and there are lots of youngsters on the streets you feel jumpy"*

*"Chatham is a rough as a badger's arse- until they sort this out people won't be going there anytime soon"!*

## 4. CAPITAL SPENDING REQUIREMENTS

More than £400,000 was spent on the Central Theatre in 2003-04, including new seating, sound system, refurbished dressing rooms, aside from a major disability access scheme. As a result there are few immediate major capital requirements, the most salient being to improve the environment/atmosphere in the Cellar Bar and to cure water incursion in the High Street end of the building, which

jeopardises box office and staff offices, including water damage to ICT equipment.

To address the items listed below we will be looking to our existing repairs and maintenance funding plus a combination of external funding and increased revenue / profit:

**Air conditioning in the Cellar Bar**

The Cellar Bar suffers throughout the year (ie not merely in the warmer weather) having no air conditioning and no direct air flow from external sources. This affects audiences numbers and satisfaction levels in a number of ways.

There are frequent complaints when it is in use as a bar during shows, and the lack of a good air-conditioned environment is known to reduce its use as a lunchtime sandwich opportunity, which could be maximised for profit now tat the catering is in-house.

As a performance space for folk and jazz there are again regular complaints about the temperature, especially when at or near capacity and these have not declined since the ban on smoking last June.

The problem could be addressed with the installation of a fairly simple air-flow/cooling system at a cost of around £8–10,000.

**Water incursion problems above the box office and foyer.**

The water incursion issue affects the High Street end of the building whenever there is reasonably heavy rainfall. At its most serious, it endangers the electrical and IT installation in the box office, risking health & safety as well as a serious outage of the ticketing system when shows are taking place. It is hoped that this issue will be reported and costed in the recently conducted Condition Survey and the necessary repairs scheduled. Estimates are being sought.

**The Long-term Development of the Central Theatre**

However, the Central Theatre's stage dimension, being small and restrictive in comparison to its auditorium capacity, are a considerable inhibitor to the development of a more profitable programme. Lack of wing space, insufficient 'flying height' above the stage etc, prevent it from receiving large-scale touring work such as No1 tours of musicals (Joseph, Grease etc), large orchestral concerts and more. Development of a programme of this kind will be crucial to the establishment of audiences for the new large-scale cultural theatre building, to underpin the new venue's programme and audience base.

# B. THE BROOK THEATRE

## 1 PROGRAMME AND USERSHIP

### Programming Policy

To present, with financial support from the Arts Council of England South East an exciting and challenging programme of cutting-edge drama, physical theatre, contemporary dance and music, linked to an audience development strategy aimed at attracting entirely new audiences to the venue. Initially targeted at young people (under 30's), in the longer term The Brook Theatre aims to offer something for people of every age, experience and ability.

The Brook Theatre's ethos is as a welcoming, accessible and affordable community venue which arts and entertainment groups in Medway can afford to use to make their own work.

The Brook Theatre is open six days per week (and occasionally on Sundays) from 8.30 am to 11pm daily.

Sample quotes from users:

*"I am writing to let you know what a thoroughly enjoyable time we all had at Wind in the Willows at The Brook Theatre" – All Saints C of E School (Dec 06)*

*"See the Brook Theatre in its full glory……it was heartening to see a sell out audience supporting original, live entertainment on a Saturday night in Chatham" FW (by email re Cabaret Besame Mucho, Fuse Festival May 07)*

*"I think this is a very good local theatre……something to suit everyone (Mrs B, Rochester by comment card re Brook Sep 07)*

*"We much appreciate the very helpful Tech crew. The theatre was excellent so we'll use again" - Stage Theatre Society, Dec 06 on feedback form re Brook*

### How is The Brook Theatre used?

The Brook is in regular, constant use by hirers on at least six days every week, for arts-based workshops and the rehearsal and presentation of arts and entertainment, as well as for training courses, exhibitions, conferences and seminars of all scales.

Medway Council's Arts Development Team organises a range of regular, weekly dance workshops and programmes a number of events at The Brook as part of the Fuse Festival.

The Brook Art Gallery operates an open access policy for artists in Medway to present their work at an affordable cost, in a sympathetic environment open to the public six days a week.

The Brook Theatre plays host to a small number of professional creative companies who have made their operational base there. They make and present work, assisting The Brook Theatre in programming a wider range of work now and in future and forming the nucleus of a 'creative village' in Medway. The companies presently include Loop Dance Company and Play on Words Theatre Company.

**Key users of Brook Theatre**

- Resident dance schools.
- Main focus for Arts team's programme (Springboard, Heatwave & Meltdown) plus Fuse Festival.
- Space for four resident companies. Two spaces currently vacant, one pending the ACESE initiative
- Professional monthly programme of Folk, Jazz & Popular Medway Comedy Club, plus 'Explore the World', world music development now coming on stream.
- Annual Christmas show (text-based adaptation of children's books eg *Pinocchio, The Wind in the Willows, Charlotte's Web*) aimed at those who do not want to see a pantomime. Priced to attract those who may not be able to afford pantomime ticket price. (Response to the CPA report p20 para 68 "*The Council does not have a co-ordinated or consistent approach to pricing to facilitate access to cultural activities for those on low incomes")*

**Venue Footfall**

Footfall figures indicate a total of 72,700 ticket buyers and users of hired spaces in 2006-07.

**Recent developments in programming at the Brook Theatre**

**Medway Comedy Club**
Popular monthly club which has regular sell-outs and is currently planning to re-launch its programme in 2008 to fill the gap between this audience and the lucrative headline comedy at the Central Theatre.

**World Music Programme** "Explore the World"
Brook Theatre is a member of Roots Roundabout – an ACESE-funded consortium of venues. Successful pilot completed and two-year funding now in place to develop three tours per year in 2008 & 2009.

**Christmas Show**
Established as a high quality, text-based non-pantomime offering for children and families who do not wish to attend a panto. Competitively priced tickets offer Christmas entertainment for those who may not be able to afford the necessarily high-priced pantomime ticket at the Central Theatre.

*"I have never seen so much energy expended on stage as I did at Chatham's Brook Theatre where the much-loved 'The Wind in the Willows' is being staged by Blunderbus Theatre Company". Medway Standard, December 6*

**Studio Showcase**
An economical hire package for users of the Studio Theatre. Specifically targeted to enable smaller amateur (and some professional) drama companies to perform within a viable cost structure. Currently attracts 8-10 hires per year.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

To become an arts-based resource for the Medway Community by offering:

A challenging programme of work

An environment in which involvement in the arts is encouraged through workshops, courses and projects

To continue to develop relationships with the emerging professional arts companies who will use The Brook Theatres their base for making and presenting work.

The Brook has the potential to develop audiences in Medway for cutting-edge work that cannot presently be presented. The limitations of the venue and the capital requirements to overcome them are discussed later.

**Limitations on the development of the Brook programme include:**

- Sound transference (prevents two performances happening at the same time and also restricts smaller room usage in many cases)
- Poor presentational capability of main theatre - need for a clean, 'black box' environment with flexible lighting capability – damages venue credibility in the industry and audience perceptions of the product's quality.
- Seating – in poor state of repair, further maintenance is difficult and expensive - only one seating configuration is achievable
- Dressing rooms (in poor condition and not accessible)
- Lack of second fire escape to Studio Theatre artificially limits its capacity to 60 seats, restricting potential income and usage.
- Difficult location – outside the ring road – pedestrian access is difficult - no real frontage.
- Non air-conditioned auditorium deters audiences as stimulates complaints in warmer weather

## 3. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

### Strengths

- Two auditoria of differing capacities
- Variety of smaller spaces for workshop, tutorial uses etc
- Friendly welcoming image as a community venue
- Centrally placed bar
- Well-known location/identity
- Strong user base

### Weaknesses

- Poor location outside ring road
- Noise transference prevents multiple uses of performance spaces
- Main auditorium offers limited presentational flexibility and is not a 'clean' presentation environment
- Small bar area limits income potential
- Awkward pedestrian access and low level of passing pedestrian traffic

## 4. CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REQUIREMENTS

### Priorities for the Brook Theatre

In summary, the principal issues at the Brook, not necessarily in priority order are set out below. To address the items listed below we will be looking to our existing repairs and maintenance funding plus a combination of external funding and increased revenue / profit across the venues:

- New seating in the Main Theatre.
- Improve the presentational capability of the Main Theatre to industry standard.
- Cure problems of sound transference throughout the building
- Add air conditioning to the Main Theatre.
- Install new Main Theatre dimmer racks
- New venue sound system
- Create a second fire exit for the Studio to increase capacity.
- Repair water-damaged plasterwork in the Main Theatre
- Replace water-damaged Main Theatre window curtains.

**The seating in the Main Theatre.**

The installed retractable seating is at least twenty years old and has been worked extremely hard. Upholstery is in poor condition, with many individual seats broken or damaged, whilst the retracting mechanism is liable to failure. Repairs are now increasingly expensive due to non-availability of parts.

The current seating also lacks any flexibility (ie it is either all-out or all-in) whilst a new installation could be designed to offer a number of seating configurations (end-on, in-the-round, traverse etc) and could increase seating capacity and therefore financial capacity.

The cost of full replacement to a suitable specification is likely to be £200,000

**The presentational capability of the Main Theatre.**

The Main Theatre retains all the trappings of its original purpose as a Town Hall Ballroom, with ornate art-deco chandeliers and a high red-curtained stage. For the kind of work planned for the Brook in its role as an exciting and innovative 'arts hub' for Medway, this style of presentation could not be more inappropriate.

What is needed is a clean 'black box' in which to present cutting-edge physical theatre, drama, contemporary dance, children's theatre etc with credibility that will make the presenting companies actively want to play in Medway and to return. The quick-win black-boxing of the Brook Studio Theatre has demonstrated this very effectively but naturally, being much smaller, the cost of doing so was minimal.

The first step is to employ a qualified structural engineer to ascertain the current roof-loading and recommending what work may be required to accept the weight of the black box, curtaining and lighting truss etc. That done, the cost of moving towards the black box can be calculated, including the cost of safely removing

and storing the chandeliers, (which are part of the building's listed status) and creating a demountable forestage, to increase performance space.

Reaching this level of presentational capability is a sine qua non in obtaining programme development and audience development funding from external funders such as Arts Council England South East.

The initial cost of employing a structural engineer to report might be in the region of £5,000

**Sound transference throughout the building**

The feasibility study conducted by ACT Consultants on behalf of Medway Renaissance, identified as a priority, the problem the venue management have struggled with since the building returned to Medway Council control in 2000, namely the issue of sound 'bleed' between rooms and between floors, throughout the venue. The most significant ramification of this is that, unless sound levels are minimal, no two spaces can be used/programmed at the same time because of noise transference, thereby artificially limiting the useable capacity and the income of the building. As yet nobody has investigated the scale of the problem, to establish of rectifying it can be achieved economically, making cost estimates impossible.

The immediate need therefore is to employ a qualified acoustic engineer to carry out a full survey and recommend solutions and costs, Such a survey should itself cost in the region of £5,000.

**Air conditioning for the Main Theatre.**

Quite simply, the lack of air conditioning in the building, but especially in the Main Theatre has, in recent years, proved a major customer service issue from May to October. In this case, 'customers' are defined as hirers and performing companies, as well as audiences and staff. The cost of installation has yet to be confirmed but is likely to be in the region of £50,000.

**The Main Theatre dimmer rack installation**

The dimmer racks, which control the level of lighting to the stage, are old and beyond economic repair. Replacing them will permit the presentation of stage performances while controlling risks to performers, hirers and staff by removing equipment which represents a constant fire hazard.

Cost of replacement estimated at £10,000

**The venue's sound system**

The current sound system is often inadequate for the needs of musicians being programmed, resulting either in these bands not being booked or expensive equipment hire. Again if the Brook Theatre is to assume the role of an art hub for Medway, driving programme and audience development initiatives, an industry-wide standard of equipment is needed.

Cost, according to specification, from £20-30,000

**A second fire exit for the Studio to increase capacity**

The Studio Theatre, formerly the Council Chamber, has a seating capacity of sixty. This number is artificially capped by the fact that the space has only one fire exit but previous Fire Officers have verbally indicated that the licensed capacity could be increased to around one hundred, were a second fire exit to be installed. Management have proposed that a fire door could be installed in the north east corner of the space, breaking through to a recognised fire exit staircase.

An estimated cost for this is £10,000 but no structural examination has been made to allow quotations to be prepared.

**Repair water-damaged plasterwork in the Main Theatre** The cause of this damage has been repaired but the visible peeling plasterwork remains unsightly.

Estimated cost for removal and repainting are in the region of £8-10,000

**The Main Theatre window curtains**

These curtains produce the 'black-out' required for daytime and spring/summer evening presentation (the stage lighting of presentations in early May can be affected by an inadequate black-out as late as 9pm).

The curtains in situ are old, faded, in shabby condition and several have been badly affected by the water incursion from a damaged roof parapet (repaired in 2005).

The cost of their replacement is estimated at £10,000

## C. GENERAL

### Secondary income (Brook & Central)

### a) Confectionery & ice creams

- CT sales just under £58,000 in 2006-07. Profit of £32,535 (56%).

- Brook confectionery sales are smaller, due to audience levels but a profit of £4,075 was returned in 2006-7 (59% of turnover.)

### b) Vending Machines

Vending machines generate a profit of £4,000 at the Brook

### c) Bars and Catering

Bars and catering were taken back in-house in 2005-06 and are run by a full-time Catering Manager and Assistant, supported by casual staff. The Bar and Catering operation now makes a small operating profit (£7,000 in 2006-7) where previously a loss was made when the facilities were franchised. Equally importantly, the venues now have full control of quality and customer care